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Massage, an Occupation for the Blind.

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MASSAGE, AN OCCUPATION FOR THE BLIND.

By L. Webster Fox, A.M., M.D.
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

The very important question of providing employment for intelligent blind persons is now occupying, more than ever, the attention of all who are interested in their welfare, and certainly none is more solicitous for their welfare than the ophthalmologist. He is, however, too often at a loss when a hopeless case of blindness comes under his notice, as to what occupation he should recommend the poor sufferer to pursue. Organ playing, music teaching and piano tuning are fairly remunerative to the blind; but all do not possess the necessary qualifications, and it is not always easy to find such occupation for those who have the requisite ability. It is well, therefore, that we can confidently recommend the systematic, careful training of capable, healthy blind persons in the art of massage as a remunerative employment for them.

From time immemorial massage has been practiced by the blind in Japan, and, with the view of introducing a new occupation for the blind in England, the "Institute for Massage by the Blind" was founded a few years ago in London. It received at once the enthusiastic and powerful support of such eminent members of the medical profession as Dr. Henry Power (an ex-president of the Royal College of Surgeons), Sir Anderson Critchett and others, who also became acting directors of the institute. There are now 21 masseuses and 15 masseurs on the list of the blind graduates of the institute, and the greatest satisfaction is expressed by those who employ them. It is, however, not sufficiently well known in a quiet way instruction in massage has for some years past been given to blind persons in the ordinary massage classes of the Philadelphia

Orthopædic Hospital and Infirmary for Nervous Diseases in Philadelphia, and several have gone forth from that institution, certified as having gone through the regular course of training and competent to perform their duties as masseurs. Some of these were persons who became blind in adult life, but several were pupils who had completed their general education at the excellent institution for the Instruction of the Blind at Overbrook, near Philadelphia.

The fact that the blind make good masseurs has been satisfactorily demonstrated, but in this country it is not yet fully appreciated by the medical profession that the blind operator is fully as competent as the sighted masseur, and that it is the aim of this contribution to bring this matter more definitely before the profession, for only through and by the profession can any effort to help the blind in this way prove a complete success. Many of those trained in London are being employed by members of the medical profession, and there are several in hydropathic establishments, and some are in private practice for themselves. As soon as the profession here holds out its helping hand to the blind by testing the work they do, and recommending them to their patients as masseurs, just so soon will the public confidence in them be assured, and a fairly remunerative occupation for the blind be definitely established.

"Helping the blind to help themselves" is the modern motto of the blind and their friends, and by furthering this new undertaking untold good may be effected. This occupation for the blind does not compel them to leave their homes to go into an institution, and, beyond the proper training in massage, the only equipment needed is a good physical condition, with good manners and presentable appearance. It especially preserves the home life, which is so dear to blind persons.

Since I have been made chairman of the "committee on schools" by the Board of Managers of the Philadelphia Orthopædic Hospital and Infirmary for Nervous Diseases, the department of massage has been placed directly under the inspection of this committee, and I have endeavored to gather all information that would be of value and at the same time give the medical profession an opportunity to see what our institution is doing to promote this

good work. No course of instruction is given anywhere in this country equal to that given by the Orthopædic Hospital. The instruction is carried out in systematic courses by competent instructors under the supervision of one of the ablest staffs of physicians in Philadelphia. The managers of the hospital are doing all within their powers to retain the high standard of proficiency inaugurated many years ago by such eminent physicians as S. Weir Mitchell, Wharton Sinkler, Morris J. Lewis, W. J. Taylor, G. G. Davis and others.

The wage-earning capacity of the average laborer is between two and three hundred dollars per annum. A blind man, trained as a masseur, can earn this much and more. Therefore, instead of becoming a burden on the community or his friends, he can lead a happy, useful and independent life.

The following is a history of a young man whose life work was necessarily abandoned by the sudden loss of sight. He then determined to study massage, and at this succeeded beyond his expectation. I could quote other cases of similar character.

Mr. William J. Nealon, of Philadelphia, in the spring of 1901, suddenly lost his eyesight from glaucoma upon the eve of taking his final examinations in the Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia. After recovering somewhat from the shock, he turned his attention to the study of massage, and he soon found that blindness favored a concentration of thought and a careful study of the cases he was called upon to treat. His previously acquired anatomical and surgical knowledge was of especial value to him in detecting and treating abnormalities of various kinds. The sense of touch grew more and more acute by practice, and he soon became capable of graduating the rapidity and force of his manipulation, just as we graduate the doses of medicine we administer. In his abdominal manipulations he has learned to detect inequalities and sensitive areas which might easily escape the notice of even a good-sighted masseur. Mr. Nealon received his instruction in massage and attended the lectures upon the subject at the Orthopædic Hospital, etc., and he soon found opportunities for keeping up the practice of the art in the St. Agnes and Howard hospitals. In the latter hospital he has been officially appointed as the masseur, and he has treated in the clinics as many as a score of patients in one day.

He has also massaged and is still massaging under the direction of some of the prominent medical practitioners and neurologists of the city of Philadelphia, all of whom express confidence in his ability and satisfaction with his work. On several occasions Mr. Nealon has found that his blindness has served a good purpose.

Delicate, weak, paralytic children are very amenable to the gentle, careful touch of the blind and are not so frightened as they sometimes are at seeing a sighted masseur. In Mr. Nealon's opinion, massage is an employment peculiarly suited to an intelligent blind person, who should, however, possess a fair knowledge of anatomy and undergo a thorough course of training in the art before attempting to practice it.

I have asked my friend, Dr. Robert C. Moon, of our city, and secretary of the Pennsylvania Home Teaching Society and Free Circulating Library for the Blind, to contribute his opinion of the importance of creating another occupation for the blind. I know of no man as eminently qualified to express an opinion on this subject. His many years of charitable work among the blind puts him in close touch with them and he knows their wants and willingness to follow any suggestions that will open new avenues to independence and self-support. Dr. Moon writes as follows:

"Knowing how deeply you sympathize with the blind in their sad affliction, which too often cuts them off from almost every means of support, I hope you will pardon me for troubling you with a few lines in reference to 'Massage by the Blind,' which, for many years, has been practiced by them in Japan and has proved remunerative to several blind persons who have been properly trained under the auspices of the 'Institute for the Massage by the Blind' in London. The board of that institute has Dr. Henry Power for its chairman, with whom are several well-known members of the medical profession, such as Sir G. Anderson Critchett, Drs. R. Marcus Gunn, Arnold Lawson, William Lang, Malcolm McHardy, J. Fletcher Little, etc. Whilst I was in England during the past summer, I frequently heard of the success of this movement to provide intelligent blind persons with an employment which helps much toward making them self-supporting, and, in response to my inquiries for further information, the honorary secretary has kindly forwarded me a copy of the first report of the institute, with

an interesting leaflet upon massage by the blind, which is being circulated in England. I beg leave to pass these on to you for perusal, and I feel sure you will be impressed by the fact that the work in London has passed beyond the experimental stage.

"It appears to me that a concerted effort of a similar kind, if initiated by the medical profession, might very properly be made in Philadelphia to help many intelligent blind persons to acquire the art of massage and electrical treatment in a thoroughly scientific manner, and, after they have become proficient and are certified, to assist them by providing for them an office where the work can be superintended and facilities afforded them for administering treatment to patients recommended by the profession.

"It is neither advisable nor necessary to form a new society to carry out this plan. I feel hopeful that the board of managers of the Pennsylvania Home Teaching Society and Free Circulating Library for the Blind, of which I have the honor to be secretary, would be disposed to take up the business part of the project if some medical institution would undertake the part of professional training.

"Undoubtedly the blind pupils receive the very best training available, and it occurs to me that probably no institution in this city is so well equipped for such teaching as the Philadelphia Orthopædic Hospital and Infirmary for Nervous Diseases, Seventeenth and Summer streets. Do you think that the board of managers would deem the matter worthy of their kindly consideration? If they should consent to take favorable action, under suitable conditions, the professional part is at once satisfactorily disposed of, and it is possible that they might take the whole matter in hand.

"To make massage by the blind a success it is doubtless necessary that the confidence and sympathetic coöperation of the members of the medical profession should be assured, and through them the public would soon become accustomed to and welcome such means of treatment. I feel confident that if the project is undertaken in a systematic manner and under the auspices of the Orthopædic Hospital it can not fail to prove successful. I do not presume to say what plans will prove to be the best, but I venture to ask you kindly to invite your co-managers to give the matter their careful and, I trust, favorable consideration.

"Please excuse the length of this communication and believe me to be, my dear Dr. Fox, Very sincerely yours,

"ROBERT C. MOON."

Mr. Tadasu Yoshimoto has contributed a very interesting article on "Massage by the Blind in Japan," which I quote:

"The blind in Japan have been trained from time immemorial in massage, acupuncture and music, and up to very recently none but the blind, with a few exceptions, were engaged in the above occupations. Of late, however, seeing people have entered into the same arena as the blind, and the competition is, in consequence, becoming a keen one.

"To acquire a good knowledge of the science and art of massage, pupils spend from three to five years at the schools for the blind. It is, however, imperative for each such pupil to have received, prior to his taking massage, a good general education. When found efficient in massage, the blind student either accepts a post in one of the blind schools or starts business on his own account. His vocation, then, if he takes the latter, becomes like that of a doctor, daily receiving or visiting patients as the case may be. So, instead of being a burden to society, he is well able to support himself. Massage is also taught by private masters who take apprentices, the years of apprenticeship ranging from three to seven, according to their ages. They receive no education there, but, on the other hand, get plenty of work to do, and their condition is no better than that of a day laborer. These poor apprentices are sent out each evening by their masters to shout in the streets for patients. It is, indeed, heartrending to hear their melancholy cries in the dead of night, and particularly on a cold winter night.

"In Yokohama, for example, with a population of close on half a million, there are about 1,000 men and women engaged in massage, 400 of them belonging to a guild, 500 working on their own account, the other 100 being sighted people.

"Here I think it would be interesting and fitting as a conclusion to this subject to give a short résumé of the steps taken in former times respecting the welfare of the Japanese blind. In the year 800 A. D. blind officers were appointed as attendants to the blind members of the royal family. After this many officers were appointed to look after the welfare of the blind. The chief officer,

called "Sokengyo," was appointed in Kyoto, then the capital of Japan, whilst the others, named "Kengyo," were allotted a province each. There was also a poor rate levied throughout the country for the blind, and the blind were only to pay a small fee to the guild of their own locality. We may say that the blind were well cared for, so much so that we read of blind people in those days carrying on the trade of money lenders.

"In the year 1870 a great change was made, the government abolishing the posts of officers for the blind and doing away altogether with the poor rate for them. This, cruel as it may appear, has been a great blessing in disguise, for under the old régime the blind were always object of pity, and, in fact, were in the long run killed with kindness. Under present conditions, however, they are sympathized with and helped to help themselves, much to their improvement as useful members of society."

The establishment of the Institution for Massage by the Blind in London has opened the way for this new occupation in England, just as the Orthopædic Hospital opened the way in Philadelphia. In an address on "Massage by the Blind," delivered at the International Conference of the Blind held in Edinburgh, June, 1905, Mrs. MacNicol, honorable secretary of the above institution (London), spoke, in part, as follows:

"The first essential in any work to ensure lasting success is to do it well. This is now proved beyond all doubt as regards the blind in the work of massage. They do it well. As there is an ever-increasing demand for what is well done in every profession, it must clearly be to the public advantage to employ the blind as masseurs and masseuses. What I know of massage from personal experience is that I found the treatment most successful, and I have had it in many countries. It is now more and more extensively prescribed, since mental and surgical cases come under its beneficial influence with most satisfactory results; therefore, a wider field is open for those who practice it. Our operators are carefully selected as to health and fitness. They are taught in the same classes with the sighted. They hold the highest certificate of efficiency in massage that can be obtained in London before we ask the public to employ them. They have, also, in a very marked degree, the natural qualifications for this work—delicacy of touch, power of thought con-

centration, magnetic influence, and, best of all, gentle sympathy and the desire to do their best. While to us the thought is comparatively new, Japan has assigned this work of massage to the blind from time immemorial. But what concerns us most is, naturally, those who are nearest us. The blind, however painstaking and efficient they may be, can not make a market for themselves nor press their needs, and we who are interested in them know that machinery and other causes have closed many occupations against them within recent years. Massage, which has hitherto been a treatment for the few, will be more within the reach of many. Christianity from the beginning has taught us to give the blind a foremost place as those we ought to help. A great deal has been and is done most lovingly for them. They are well cared for, but we have not succeeded yet in giving them independence. They have very independent spirits and great courage, and we owe much to their example in this. The work of massage is a step toward independence. It is remunerative and gives the operators variety of thought and bodily exercise. Let us help the blind to secure a fair share of it, since, as I have said before, they do it well."

The State of Pennsylvania appropriates each year the munificent sum of $92,000 for the schools for the blind and blind men's and women's homes. It would be a new and appropriate departure for these institutions to have teachers instruct such pupils who are not endowed with mechanical or musical ability in the art of massage. Let these teachers instruct the pupils, who would elect this course, scientifically, thus preparing them with the means of earning a comfortable livelihood.

The Orthopædic Hospital has opened its doors for all blind pupils who wish to prepare for this work, and it is the wish of the Board of Managers that this school may have many applicants, so that the good work inaugurated by our staff of physicians may continue its instruction years to come to the advantage and benefit of this unfortunate class—the blind.

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